

A VISIT TO THE WESTERN GOLD FIELDS.

[FROM OUR SPECIAL REPORTER.]

No. XXXV.

The plains of Merrinbee, bounded to the southward by the foothills which terminate the steep descents from the table-land, extend to that point where the waters of the Merree mingle with those of the Cudgegong; from thence the united streams, following the windings of a deep but narrow valley, pursue a north-westerly course for about twenty-five miles, whence they form a junction with the Macquarie in such a manner as to create a doubt whether the Macquarie receives the Cudgegong or the Cudgegong receives the Macquarie. On the southern banks contracted undulating flats stretch from the margin of the river to the base of the plateau, which presents the appearance of continuous range of lofty mountains broken here and there by some deep gorge, through which the streams, swelled by one of those thunderstorms which are of such frequent occurrence in these Alpine regions, come rushing from the heights with short lived but resistless force, until they reach the flats, across which they glide to the main stream. On the northern bank lower ranges descend more gently from their dome-like crests, on whose broad slopes the sombre hues of an Australian forest contrast with occasional patches of bright green sward. The dray road to Burrendong follows the sinuosities of the valley—here passing under shady clumps of oak along the margin of the stream, and bald hills, and grassy plains, present an appearance of cultivation that does not exist, and I afterwards found that three publicans, a solitary stockman, and a few diggers, comprised almost the entire population of a large portion of the lovely district that lay spread out before me. The descent from the summit of the range for one-third of the distance is somewhat too steep to be agreeable to either man or horse; but below that long spur shoot out from the foothills and benches, and gradually subside into the plains that border the river.

About half way down the range you arrive at a broad bench or steppe, intersected by the Devil's Hole Creek, which, having its source in the range to the eastward, follows the base of the main chain for a short distance, and then, sweeping round and forcing a passage through the lower hills and ridges, enters the plains. A few hundred yards from the point where it breaks from the ridge several strata of compact calcareous schist are exhibited on the northern bank; their dip to the west is scarcely perceptible, and they appear to have been but little disturbed. On the opposite bank a low ridge of arenaceous schist, covered with fragments of quartz, sinks into the stream. From the source to this spot the creek has been much worked, and has yielded a vast quantity of gold, but lower down its auriferous character ceases. It may also be remarked that no gold has been found in the country between the northern bank and the main range; this stream may therefore be said to form the north-western boundary of the Burrendong mining district. The highest portion of the creek on the bench is known as the upper diggings. This locality has been very productive; now, with the exception of two paths profitably employed paddling the old ground, the whole creek is deserted. It was originally worked by Europeans, but the traces of recent Chinese encampments are to be observed scattered along the banks, and the fact of these people having departed is a conclusive evidence that the gold has departed also.

THE WAGNER FORGERIES.
(From the Times, May 18.)

THE Wagner gang just convicted at the Old Bailey, were social enemies, almost respectable from the magnitude of their operations and the artful resources developed in their attacks upon their natural victims, the banking community of this metropolis. The history of their lives reads like a chapter from "The Pursuit of Knowledge under Difficulties," or an account of the stages of invention which produced our present steam-engine, than like the process of robbing a banker of £265. The most patient labour, the most careful tracking of occult truths, the most open-eyed observation of trifling indications, the qualities which have given statues and immortal names to Harvey and Watt and Stephenson, seemed to have been possessed and exercised by William Wagner, Robert Humphreys, William Wynne Bramwell, William Whitehead Chandler, and Andrew Foster. Their process was indeed the reverse of that which is employed by the benefactors of mankind; their business was to shut out light, not to create it, to walk in darkness and to erase their footprints as they trod; but the qualities of mind developed by the philosophers and the swindlers are almost equally rare. Wagner and his confederates elevated forgery to the dignity of a science, and pressed into its service all the fine arts that could aid in its advancement. Imitative penmanship, engraving, die-sinking, personation of the finest acting, and little romances flowing from imaginations always fruitful, and composed with the most minute attention to social probabilities and to the unities of time and place, were all lavished upon the design of doing one false act in the face of day, before the practised eyes of men trained to examine that act, and to invest it with such a character of truth that it should pass unchallenged and leave no track behind it. It is a great fact in the progress of civilization. It is a strong contrast to the clumsy crowbar and horse-pistol system of ruder times. To a mere tyro in swindling it might seem an easy thing to forge a cheque and receive the money for it; but Wagner and his friends knew that to do this with any certainty of success and after-imprisonment of the highest order of difficulty. Ten years of meditation over a previous miscarriage had taught the master forger the arduous nature of his calling. If he failed, he failed as Cesare Borgia failed, by an unfortunate error in the objects upon whom he exercised his treachery and his confidence.

The machinery of Wagner was after this way.—There lived an aged man, bent with years and infirmities, who had passed his long life in the laborious acquisition of facility in imitating other men's signatures. The talent had not fructified in his possession; for we find him living in a miserable lodging and in a single room, always engaged in writing, and by no means in possession of those advantages which so absolute a power over the signatures of all the bankers and all the money-dealers of the city of London would appear likely to confer. The talent of Old Kerp was the raw material of Wagner's machinery. There is a sect among the Chinese who make it a religious duty to search for scraps of writing and to consume them by fire. Perhaps the Chinese, who invented everything, have had Waggers among them, and founded the sect in order to keep down the Waggers, just as mice may be said to be the propagators of the race of cats. But Wagner, at any rate, was industrious in the collection of autographs. Wagner was more careful in preserving the letter of his lightest acquaintance than the Countess of Ossory was in laying up a note from Horace Walpole. When Mr. Fellowes, a solicitor, entered into a correspondence with Robert Humphreys as to the terms of a projected lease, Wagner carefully put the letter by; and when Dr. Jones wrote a note about some equally common subject Wagner remarked that "it would come in nicely by-and-

bye. These precious signatures and scraps of writing were taken to Kerp, and that industrious old man laboured at them as models until he had acquired the power of perfect imitation. The next and obvious step was to utilize this power by writing a false order for the passbook of the person whose signature was intended to be falsified, for the purpose of knowing for what balance they might safely draw. Then came the engraving of the cheque, and as it would not be quite safe to send the blank to Somerset-house to be stamped, and as it was well to avoid even the slight suggestion of a suspicion which might possibly arise from the fixing of an adhesive stamp, a die of the check stamp was perfected after many trials, and the instrument being filled up by Kerp, and the signature neatly forged, the fraudulent instrument might be supposed to be complete. A meaner mind would have been satisfied, but not so Wagner. We must suppose that Kerp, although the master penman, and therefore necessary to the work of giving the true style to the handwriting of the body of the cheque, had his scholars among Wagner's friends. Why should Wagner throw away any part of the booty upon this old man? His pupils, Bateman and Chandler, could copy the forgery with sufficient skill, and when the copies had been made Kerp's original forgery was taken back to him with "no effects written upon it." Thus was the old forger cheated out of all share in the produce of his original work.

The next point, and the most difficult of all, was the realization of the amount. The presentation of the cheque is to the forger what the moment of projection is to the alchemist. It often passes easily and prosperously; but there are operations which do not become more facile from repetition, and it was necessary not only to provide for the honest division of the proceeds in case of success, but also for the escape of the agent in the eventuality of failure. When, for instance, the confederates had just obtained £440 for a cheque originally forged by poor Kerp, but copied and presented by Chandler, it was probable that the face of the gentleman who arranged that transaction at the counter would be likely to dwell upon the memory of the cashier. It was easier to produce cheques than to find fresh agents to cash them; and this was the weak point in Wagner's system. Wagner addressed himself to this difficulty with his accustomed ingenuity. The agent was always provided with proof that he was himself the trusting and innocent victim of some untraceable scoundrel. The preparation for this purpose was highly artful. First the intended agent inserted an advertisement in a newspaper for occupation. To this advertisement he received an answer, with an appointment to meet the intended employer at a coffee-house, or at some suddenly-taken lodgings. The agent kept the appointment, and there was met by the disguised confederate who was to bear theonus of the possible discovery. The meeting was made as publicly as possible, and the endeavour was that the landlord and waiters should be able to swear distinctly to the identity of the agent, but should know nothing of the disguised confederate. Thus, if the dreaded catastrophe should happen—if the agent should be stopped at the Bank—his innocence was evident. He advertised for employment, a sharper answered his advertisement, met him at a coffee-house, and sent him to change the cheque. The letters, the advertisement, and the perfectly true evidence of the waiters, bear out this tale; the agent goes scot-free, and the only result of the failure is the loss of the forged cheque. Other pretexts were, of course, taken upon the "Quis custodiet custodes?" principle. The agent was to be watched lest he should run off with all the money; and, as it was better that he should be watched by persons whom he could not identify, he was placed at the corner of a street while those who were to watch him passed among the crowd and made themselves acquainted with his features.

This is the Wagner system as it has just been developed during three days of investigation at the Central Criminal Court. Its theory was perfect, but it slightly failed in practice. The forgeries ought to be as much above suspicion as Caesar's wife; but the ingenious deception put upon Old Kerp had probably rendered the imitations less perfect than those of his cunning hand prepared. The theory requires that the confederate who acts the swindler at the coffee-house should be untraceable; but Wagner played the part himself, and was traced; and, lastly, the working of all machinery requires coherency of action and proper test of materials; but Wagner was entrapped by a journeyman baker, whom he had tempted and trusted without sufficient test, and he was denounced by an accomplice. This ingenious man had been working at the Central Criminal Court. Its theory was perfect, but it slightly failed in practice. 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forms but an episode in the great project of universal conquest and plunder. The allied fleet in the Mediterranean will have Egypt at their mercy, while the insignificant English squadron is preparing to defend itself against overwhelming numbers, under the batteries of Malta. The Russian armies may cross the Rhine at their pleasure. The vast garrison of Georgia can overrun Arabic Turkey. Montenegro and Bosnia have probably already received notice of the intended revolution. Ionian Greece has perhaps long since concerted measures with Greece. If Hungary yields to the blandishment of Russian promises, enforced by an army of occupation, the right arm of Austria will be paralysed in a struggle for life and death. Tuscany, Massa, and Carrara have set the example of an insurrection which will probably spread to the heel of the Italian peninsula. The treason of the 2nd of December was not more skilfully organised, and for the moment the outbreak of the Imperial plot may possibly be attended with almost equal success. The ultimate solution will perhaps depend on the question whether England and Germany are not more than a match for France, for Russia, and for their confederates; but for the moment, at least of the neutrals is unarmed, nor is it justifiable to enter upon war on suspicion, however probable.

If it should unhappily be found that war is inevitable, the Government, however it may at the time be composed, ought above all things to remember the necessity of carrying public opinion along with its policy, by taking the nation into its councils. It would be far better to allow a future enemy some start in a campaign than to enter on the struggle with divided convictions against the will of a considerable and zealous minority.

The Crimean war at least taught the lesson, that England is now capable of unanimity when the national honour is visibly at stake. Habitual sympathy for the Italian cause, and well-founded dislike of Austrian despotism, furnish sufficient reasons, independently of interested motives, for the general desire of strict neutrality. If the grounds for interference should, nevertheless, be found to preponderate, they are of such a nature that they must shortly force themselves on universal attention. The English people will not be unduly tolerant of demonstrations on an element where France and Russia have no enemy to oppose, and the remotest prospect of more direct aggression will arouse all classes to anticipate invasion. In this case it is not the business of statesmen to take the initiative, but rather to guide, to organise, and possibly to control, the spontaneous energies of their fellow-subjects. The majority of candidates have in the last week been lost in their professions of rigid neutrality, but it is by no means impossible that before the general election is concluded, popular orators may find it expedient to hurl defiance at a dangerous Coalition. The Ministry can scarcely bear that the majority of the people supporting her Italian practices has influence over the rest of Italy, and, perhaps, in stoning the constitutional life of Italy: "No! not even so!" But Prussia ought to be prepared for every eventuality. Her calling is to defend the interests of Germany.

M. Simon (ex-President of the National Assembly at Frankfort) declared he had no sympathy whatever for the present system of government. "The man who has broken faith cannot restore it."

He then added, "I am sorry to say that we have not yet got rid of the Emperor's influence."

The end cannot justify the means. Since Sardinia had thought fit to join the revolution and call in foreigners into Italy she had lost all claim to respect.

Prussia and Austria were at variance on many points. But Austria counted 8,000,000 Germans among her subjects; there was therefore a German interest in the south, and the time had not yet come.

Prussia should never allow herself to be actuated by a vote of the majority at Frankfort.

When the time comes Prussia will draw the sword and place her trust in the God of Battles. (Applause.)

M. Burger (the reporter of the committee) stated that the policy of Prussia was not "neutrality," but for the present an armed mediation. She was keeping guard over the maintenance of the balance of power in Europe, and reserved it to herself to take part in the war if her conditions were not accepted.

The Chamber then proceeded to vote. The first proposal for a loan of 40,000,000 dollars was voted, without discussion, amid great applause, and the other proposals for levying certain taxes, &c., were also carried unanimously.—Times.

WHY FRANCE HAS GONE TO WAR.

The following circular note of Count Walewski to the diplomatic agents of France, at the various Foreign Courts, dated April 27th, appears in the *Moniteur*:

MONSIEUR. — The communication which has been made by order of His Imperial Majesty to the Senate and the Corps-Législatif relates not to the Senate's resolution to revert to the incidents with which public opinion has been engaged for some weeks past, and which formed the subject of my last despatches. The seriousness of the situation has become extreme, and the result unfortunately is not that which our persevering and loyal efforts were directed to secure. Under these circumstances it is a source of great satisfaction to the Government of the Emperor to be able to submit to the decision of Europe the question of deciding with what Power rests the responsibility of such an issue.

That the state of affairs in Italy was abnormal; that the uneasiness and suppressed agitation which resulted therefrom was a source of danger to all Europe; that the reaction caused by a wholesale "foreign" press to print an otherwise peaceful crisis—this was at the opinion of England, Prussia, Austria, and France. Unanimity of apprehensions also produced a conformity of sentiments and of procedure. The mission of Lord Cowley to Vienna—the proposition of a Congress emanating from St. Petersburg—the support rendered by Prussia to these attempts of an alliance—indeed, the readiness of France to adhere to the combination—which succeeded one after another up to the latest moment—all these facts have, in short, been inspired by a single motive—by a lively and sincere desire to consolidate peace, and no longer close her eyes to a difficulty which so evidently threatened to embroil her.

In this phase of the affair the Government of the Emperor has taken an initiative and active part. But it is necessary to state, has always been one of a collective character. France has simply offered its assistance as a great European Power, in order to regulate, in a spirit of friendly and concord, with the other Powers a question which excited her sympathies (I will not disguise it), but in which neither saw particular duties to fulfil nor urgent interests to defend.

On the very day when the Cabinet of Vienna had proposed in the most solemn manner not to commence hostilities, France was prepared to offer an attitude that must lead the Empire to finally conclude that an aggression was directed against Prussia.

A like assurance in giving time for the exercise of the mediation of the different Powers afforded hopes of the speedy convocation of a Congress. In fact

England had settled, with the concurrence of France, Prussia, and Russia, the final conditions of the meeting of that assembly, in which the place that justice and reason assigned to the Italian States was accorded to them.

Sardinia, on her side, gave her adhesion to the simultaneous and previous disarmament of all the Powers which had lately increased their military force. To these prospects of peace the Cabinet of Vienna suddenly opposed an act which, to characterize, is equivalent to a declaration of war. Thus Austria, actuated by her sole act the work pursued with so much energy by England, seconded with so much sincerity by Russia and Prussia, and facilitated with so much moderation by France. Not only Austria closes the door of the Congress against Sardinia, but she summons her, under pain of being constrained by force, to lay down her arms without any conditions, and within a delay of three days, to swear the truth with an army actually in march that the Austrian commander-in-chief awaits the answer of the Cabinet of Turin.

You know, Monsieur, the impression caused at London, Berlin, and St. Petersburg, by the resolution, so inopportune and so fatal, of the Cabinet of Vienna. The astonishment and displeasure of the Three Powers have been expressed by a protestation, which has been carried by public opinion into every part of Europe.

England, Prussia, and Russia, by the steps which they have hastened to take have been fully to redeem their moral responsibility, and to give vent to their offended dignity. The Government of the Emperor, moved, moreover, by similar considerations, has also indicated its own attitude, and other obligations were imposed upon it. Nothing has diminished the unanimity which was established from the first between us and the meditating Powers. The question

remains at bottom the same; but we have great confidence in the disposition of which these Powers have furnished us such striking examples to think for a single instant that they will mislead us.

The Duke of Cleveland, in a moment of weakness, has not only given his assent to give France time to come to her armaments. As in all instances Austria would shortly stand side by side with Austria on the field of battle, the sooner the disapproval of the Government of the policy of Austria was dropped the better. (Great sensation.)

He did not think the moment had arrived for Germany to send an army to Italy. The resolutions of the Diet were not installed in 1851, because the Emperor had no sympathies in Germany. He severely censured the despotic acts of Austria in Italy and her secret treaties. Moreover, Austria would never forgive Prussia for her influence in Germany, her Protestantism, her freedom of public instruction, and liberty of the Press. But it was very important to Prussia (though of no direct interest to Germany) that the power of Austria should exist independently, and the treaties are in union with his wishes—that the States of the Peninsula shall exist independently, and in their internal affairs, as well as in their relations with foreign States, shall only have to consult their own wishes. I do not know that in this respect a different opinion exists at London, Berlin, and St. Petersburg, than that which exists at Paris. However, it may be, circumstances have invested Austria in a kind of Power in Italy, with a situation universally propitious to her.

Sardinia alone has for the present escaped from an action which has altered, in the general opinion, in an important part of Europe, that system of equilibrium which was desirable to establish there. Everywhere else this fact would be very grave, but whatever were our own sentiments, we should have been satisfied with the Cabotines to point out to them this evil in order to its extirpation.

Such a reserve, Monsieur, when it concerned Sardinia, would become a forgetfulness of our essential interests. It is not the configuration of the soil which covers on that side one of the frontiers of France. The passes of the Alps are not in our hands; and it concerns us in the highest degree that the key of them remains at Turin—only at Turin. Not only French interests, but interests equally European, are involved in this. The Duke of Cleveland, who is himself a Conservative, had, nevertheless, given half his interest to his brother, and the rest had perhaps been, as the Times says, given to a divided party.

And so, fortunately, will a single fact of this sort will a world of argument:

"Up to the year 1857, the constituency of South Durham had been represented by Lord Harry Vane, a Liberal, and Mr. Farrar, a Conservative. The Duke of Cleveland, who is himself a Conservative, had, nevertheless, given half his interest to his brother, and the rest had perhaps been, as the Times says, given to a divided party."

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